

Prayer

We praise You, God of grace, for by Your amazing generosity You have accepted us even as repentant sinners. May we never belittle the grace by which we were saved and may we never make light of the cost of our salvation. Make us worthy of the love that has been lavished on us, and open our mouths to cry out in testimony to the generous love of Your amazing grace. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Retailing

Pray about the affect of the retail trade on social life in your country. Pray that the trades will be well regulated and create the stability which society needs for the good of all.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for your country's political parties and how they are funded*
- *Give thanks for the strength and courage God has given you*
- *Pray about fishing, and the way it is policed and controlled*

Meditation

Dream about the things of God;
See beyond what you experience,
And let the Spirit guide your thirsty mind
To venture where you've never dared to go.

Dream, and let God's Kingdom
Break into every area of your life,
Exposing wrong and honouring good,
And turning everything you know around.

Dream, and let the hope of glory
Fill your soul and rouse your mind;
See gates of mercy open to your deepest needs
And find that everything is possible in your Lord.

Dream, and revealed in the vision,
See the radiance of God's power
Transcend the limitations of this tired world,
To set you free as you have never known before.

Let God change the world through you.

Bible Study - Romans 10:5-13

⁵ Moses writes about the righteousness that comes from the law, saying 'the one who does these things will live by them' ⁶ But the right relationship with God that comes from faith says 'Do not say in your heart, "who will go up to heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ or "who will go down into the depths"' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? 'the Word is very close to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart.' (meaning, the word of faith we preach); ⁹ for if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For you believe in your heart that you are made right with God, and confess with your mouth that you are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says; 'All those who trust in Him will never be put to shame'. ¹² There is no difference between Jew and Greek, and the same Lord is Lord of all, and He is equally generous to all who call on Him; ¹³ for 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Review

In this remarkable passage, Paul speaks about the righteousness of God which comes through faith (10:5,6), and he goes on to speak of the importance of declaring faith (10:9,10). The passage presents the preacher with an intriguing text and a clear emphasis on preaching the Gospel as a direct consequence of faith itself (10:10,11), and he finishes with a phrase that has become well known; 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' However, most of what Paul says about faith in this passage has been said previously in Romans (for example, Paul's analysis of righteousness and faith in chapter 3). In addition, what he says about going 'up to heaven' (10:6) and going 'down into the depths' (10:7) is somewhat mysterious. It is a reference to the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 30:10-14) but Paul has added his own comments to the text in parenthesis, and it may not be immediately obvious to us what it all means!

We will need to study this passage closely in order to understand Paul's arguments, but the truth is that Paul wrote this not to help Gentiles, but Jews. He set about trying to persuade them of the truth of the Gospel by making direct connections between the life of Jesus and the very heart of the Old Testament 'Law' as summarised by Moses. He also connected his argument with the work of the prophets, though this is not obvious to us today because we are not familiar with many of texts he used (see 'going deeper'). After this, he declares that even the Old Testament testifies to a 'good news' of God that is the same for both Jews and Gentiles (10:12), and this is his basic point.

To begin with, Paul refers to a standard Jewish argument about faith, which is that righteousness comes through doing the law, and he quotes Leviticus 18:5 to confirm this; 'the one who does these things will live by them' (10:5). Then, in order to say more, Paul picks up part of Moses' famous speech to the people of Israel before entering the Promised Land (Deut 30), in which Moses sought to explain that God's law was not some unattainable religious system, but an expression of God's intimate love for His people. He said that this revelation was close at hand; no one had to 'go up to heaven' to get it, or 'cross to the other side of the sea' (Deuteronomy 30:6-10); 'No', he said, 'the word is very near to you' (Deut 30:11-14).

These words were very famous in Judaism, but Paul saw in them a prophecy of the life, ministry and death of Jesus (we look at this further, later on). Moreover, once this great text from the Old Testament is interpreted as fulfilled in Christ, it yields even further understanding of the Gospel, and suggests a strong connection between what people of faith say and do (10:9,10). Paul goes on to make the most of this, and we will find that the passage for tomorrow (10:14-22) expands on this theme and is now a very well known Scriptural text about evangelism.

In this part of his letter, Paul continues to agonise over the rejection of Jesus by his own people, the Jews. He was not willing to compromise his faith or his preaching in order to accommodate any problems the Jews had with the Gospel, and insisted that depending on the law for salvation was wrong. Yet this passage shows that Paul sought to find ways of explaining the true faith to his fellow Jews by using scripture, and he confirmed that only those who accepted Christ would be saved, whether Jew or Gentile (10:12.). This was a strong message to give the Jewish people, but Paul longed for them to be saved through Christ, their Messiah, and thus fulfil their heritage (10:1-4). Paul's attempt to get closer to his fellow Jews by means of this argument is impressive and highly instructive, but it has subsequently proved to be of more value to Christians than the Jews for whom it was intended!

Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- A study of some Old Testament quotes from the Law
- Lessons about faith
- The help of the prophets

Going Deeper

There are two main features to our further study. Firstly, an examination of verses 5 to 8 which reveals how Paul uses a variety of texts to try and persuade his fellow Jews about the Scriptural truth of the Gospel of Christ. Secondly, the conclusions about faith Paul draws from this exercise in the remaining verses 9 to 13, some of which are new to what Paul says about the Gospel in Romans, and this is where he draws from the work of the prophets..

A study of some Old Testament quotes from the Law

Paul's message at the beginning of this passage is obvious as soon as he says he is quoting Moses! (10:5). He tackles the Jewish beliefs about the law using a quote from Leviticus 18:5:

'You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the LORD.'

This section of the Levitical law is not as well known as it ought to be, for chapters 18 and 19 contain a long list of moral laws which have sometimes been described as the 'moral Ten Commandments' (except that

there are far more of them than ten!) The whole code was given to Moses by God in order to separate the Jewish people from the immorality of the nations around them (see Lev 18:1-3), and establish His authority in the daily life of His people. It begins by condemning sexual deviance (most of Leviticus 18) before moving on to describe a variety of social rights and wrong which include the famous passage; 'love your neighbour as yourself; I am the Lord' (Lev 19:18.)

On the surface, the quote in verse 5 appears to do no more than reflect the nature of Judaism to which Paul so objected, saying that if they did what the commands said, then God would regard them as 'righteous' (which means, have a 'right relationship' with them). However, it is possible that something more subtle was at work. If you compare the Old Testament quote (see above) with what Paul says, you will see that Paul's words were slightly different, speaking of 'the one' who 'does these things' (10:5). Paul had said many times before within his own letter that no-one was capable of doing the works of the law perfectly except one person, who was Jesus! You might think it a bit of a stretch of the imagination to say that Paul intended us to read this into what he wrote, but, as the famous theologian Karl Barth pointed out, there can be no other conclusion, because the more you look at the whole passage, the more you realise that all of it is about Jesus!

In the next few verses (6 to 8) Paul uses another famous Old Testament text (see above) and inserts the life of Jesus into his interpretation of the text, to make it clear that what he is doing is interpreting key Old Testament texts by means of the Gospel. The passage is worth quoting in full, because we will then gain a full picture of what is going on.

¹⁰ ... obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹¹ Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it?" ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it?" ¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it. (Deuteronomy 30:10-14)

Paul may have used this text for a number of reasons, but Deuteronomy was regarded as a highly important book that crystallised the Law, and this appeal by Moses was particularly significant. By adding his two asides about Christ (see verses 6,7), Paul was saying that you and I do not have to do anything to draw near to God ourselves, for Christ has fulfilled God's requirements for us. It was He who came from heaven and preached 'the Kingdom of heaven is near you' (Matt 4:17), and He who died and came back from the dead in resurrection power. In other words, God is close to us in Christ Jesus because He has fulfilled the Law!

Principally, this passage is an appeal by Moses to God's people to approach the law with 'all your heart and all your soul' (Deut 30:10); something that the prophet Jeremiah picked up on in his famous prophecy that one day, God would 'write the law on their hearts' (Jer 31:31). However, Paul's method was simple, he was interpreting the Law of the Old Testament according to the life, ministry and death of Jesus; and this is the way that we must interpret the Old Testament law to this day. We may not understand some of the Old Testament, but as Christians we make sense of it through Jesus.

Lessons about faith

As Paul goes through this discussion, he picks up on the very last part of Moses' words, and uses them as if to explain an important feature of the Gospel. In this way, having explained the Old Testament using the Gospel, the Old Testament then offers back inspiration that we can use. This itself is a lesson to us in how to obtain the most from God's Word!

What caught Paul's attention was Moses' phrase 'the Word ... is in your mouth and in your heart' (Deut 30:8). He immediately explains that here, 'the Word' means the preached Word of the Gospel (10:8), but goes on in the next verse to expand the idea, and explain that the Gospel is not merely heard and believed 'in the heart', but needs to be openly declared. Verse 9 tells us that our salvation depends upon a combination of confessing Jesus as Lord and also believing in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. This was very important, because Paul could have been accused of making the Gospel out to be either so intellectual or spiritual that it did not connect with real life, and his answer to this was that the Gospel is a message both believed and 'confessed'.

Incidentally, the word 'confession' means 'to agree with', so in this passage of scripture, to confess Jesus as Lord means that an individual is prepared to make it known that they agree with God that Jesus is Lord. It is certainly not something that can be kept quiet; for by definition, Christian faith is something which must be declared. This is why, for example, a testimony or 'confession of faith' is required of all candidates for baptism. Too often Christians think of 'confession' as being what we do to tell God about our sins. This is true insofar as we 'agree with' God about what we have done wrong, and tell Him all about it; but we should not neglect the other 'confession', which is the declaration of faith before God and others.

The help of the prophets

All this appears to stop Paul in his tracks and distract him from his discussion of the problem of the rejection of the faith by the Jews and the way that the Old Testament is used to support either Judaism or Christianity. In verse 10, he repeats the whole connection between belief and declaring faith again (but the other way round); this time as a statement of fact, 'for you believe in your heart that you are made right with God, and confess with your mouth that you are saved' (10:10). He then goes on to quote Isaiah 28:16 (in verse 11) and then Joel 2:32 (in verse 13) which, if you follow them, say the same thing for the third time! Isaiah's quote confirms all Paul has said previously about faith in Jesus Christ; indeed, Paul used the same text to say the same thing in the previous chapter (9:33). Then, after a brief sentence which encapsulates Paul's understanding of the universal nature of God's church (10:12), his quote from Joel says 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (10:13), which subtly shifts the emphasis of faith on to speaking out, by 'calling on the name of the Lord'.

In the next study, we will discover that Paul becomes completely distracted by the issue of declaring the Word of God, and the public confession of faith!

Application

It is generally said that the correct way to interpret the Old Testament is by using the New Testament, but here in this passage, the opposite is true, for the Old Testament helps us understand the New! This is demonstrably true of what Paul does here in the first part of our text, but it is perhaps too rigid a way of expressing how Scripture works. The Old Testament is 'old' because it points forward to something 'new', and we cannot really understand the new without knowing what went before. Although Paul connects the Old Testament with the Gospel in this passage, it is not always possible to find particular 'bits' of the Old and the New Testament which fit with each other; however, for the Christian, Christ is the true focus of all Scripture. Much of the Old Testament points forward prophetically to Christ, quite generally, and we can only see this in hindsight. However, there are some texts where the connection is specific and overt, as in Isaiah 53, which describes the death of Jesus as the 'suffering servant'.

The second part of the text is a little more controversial, for Paul appears to say that faith is not faith unless it is spoken out or declared. This may sound somewhat prescriptive, especially for those who find it difficult to 'speak out', but there is a constant theme of the New Testament that says faith must be shown. Paul says here that it must be shown by declaration, and other Scriptures suggest that faith must be demonstrated by putting it into action (see the letter of James). Paul is surely right to imply that inner ascent to faith in Christ needs to be accompanied by some evidence of that faith which testifies to Christ as Lord. This is why most churches insist that people make a public declaration of faith when they are baptised, but it would be tragic for any of us if our declaration of faith was limited to this. For most of us, it is something we need to speak out and declare to others, for Jesus Himself commanded all His followers to 'preach the Gospel' and it is up to us to apply this and not bury it!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Sometimes, it appears that the New Testament writers take considerable liberties with the text of the Old Testament, as in Paul's use of Deuteronomy. Is this acceptable?
2. In what ways do we experience the Word of God as 'close to us' (10:8)?
3. Do you believe that faith in Jesus Christ is something that must be spoken out if it is real? Discuss whether this is so.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This is an important passage of scripture, and one I recommend to people who want to try and find out how the Old and New testaments interpret each other. The Bible is a whole, and its two halves are not to be set against each other, as so many do, and as if they have some separate message for us about God. The real gift of studying God's Word is to see the connections within it, both between the Old and New Testaments and also between the individual books. Such study reveals the spiritual truth of God's Word.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *In what ways do you give evidence of your own faith in your life? This perennial question faces all Christians, but it is very important, and a question to which we must return from time to time. It is*

worthwhile spending a week praying about this, or spending a day fasting, to find out what the Lord would say about this.

- *Pray that God's church will rediscover the gift of evangelism and be unashamed of the declaration of faith and the attempt to do this in appropriate ways.*

Final Prayer

Glorious Lord, Your powerful Word challenges us over and over again. Give us the courage to accept it even where it tells us things that seem difficult to accept in our own culture, and help us to face our duty to put into practice the call of God which Your Word contains. Stay close to us, Lord; for we need Your help:
AMEN
